

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00288 01 OF 02 221300Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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P 212100Z AUG 78
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1436
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUEBEC 0288

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: TO BE, OR NOT TO BE: THAT IS RENE'S QUESTION

1. SENIOR QUEBEC CIVIL SERVANT, WHO IS ALSO A FORMER JOURNALIST AND A WELL-CONNECTED MEMBER OF THE PQ, CONFIRMED TO ME IN CONFIDENCE THAT THE QUEBEC CABINET CONTINUES TO BE DEEPLY DIVIDED OVER COURSE OF ACTION TO BE FOLLOWED IN MOUNTING ITS REFERENDUM. ULTRAS IN CABINET, INCLUDING LAURIN, PAYETTE, DUHAIME, O'NEILL, BURNS, AND CHARRON, ADVOCATE POSING DIRECT, CLEAR QUESTION ON SOVEREIGNTY. THEY WOULD PUT SUCH A QUESTION IN FULL KNOWLEDGE THAT IT WILL PROBABLY BE DEFEATED. MODERATES, LED BY CLAUDE MORIN, CONTINUE TO SUPPORT A MORE FLEXIBLE STRATEGY OF POSING A QUESTION NONCONTROVERSIAL ENOUGH TO ASSURE ITS ACCEPTANCE. MODERATE STRATEGY WOULD BE AIMED AT STAYING IN POWER WHILE PREPARING FOR FUTURE REFERENDA WHEN ATTITUDES OF POPULATION ARE BETTER CONDITIONED TO SOVEREIGNTY VOTE. SUCH A STRATEGY, HOWEVER, IS UNLIKELY RESULT IN THE GOQ RECEIVING A CLEAR MADATE TO MOVE AHEAD TOWARDS A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND MIGHT EVEN COMPROMISE SUCH A GOAL IN MINDS OF ELECTORATE BY ITS AMBIGUITY.

2. ULTRAS, SOURCE CLAIMS, ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT DEFEAT IN THE
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00288 01 OF 02 221300Z

REFERENDUM AS WELL AS DEFEAT IN SUBSEQUENT GENERAL ELECTION. SOME ACTUALLY LOOK FORWARD TO CLAUDE RYAN'S BECOMING THE NEXT PROVINCIAL PREMIER, COUNTING ON HIS "INTRANSIGENT CHARACTER" TO CREATE AN "IRRECONCILABLE CONFRONTATION" WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. ULTRAS BELIEVE THAT IN SUCH A CONFRONTATION TRIBAL INSTINCTS OF QUEBECOIS WOULD INEVITABLY BECOME EMOTIONALLY ENGAGED. WITH COMPROMISE PRECLUDED AND COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS

RUNNING HIGH, SCENARIO CONCLUDES WITH RYAN'S GOVERNMENT DISCREDITED AND LOSING POWER TO RESURGENT SEPARATISTS, OR RYAN HIMSELF LEADING QUEBEC IN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. EITHER WAY, THE GOAL OF THE ULTRAS--SEPARATION--WOULD BE REALIZED.

3. THUSFAR, LEVESQUE HAS NOT CONCLUSIVELY COMMITTED HIMSELF TO EITHER STRATEGY. HE NOW SEEMS TO TILT TOWARDS MODERATES FEARING CONSEQUENCE OF MORE EXTREME OPTION FOR QUEBEC, FOR HIS PARTY, AND FOR HIMSELF. HOWEVER, MY SOURCE, WHO IS A LONG TIME LEVESQUE-WATCHER, BELIEVES THE PREMIER WILL ULTIMATELY OPT FOR THE MORE EXTREME STRATEGY WHEN FACED WITH CHOICE BETWEEN VIRTUALLY CERTAIN DEFEAT OF REFERENDUM AND ACCEPTANCE OF HUMILIATING COMPROMISE ON WATERED DOWN REFERENDUM QUESTION. TO SUPPORT HIS GLOOMY PREDICTION, SOURCE CITES LEVESQUE'S "ALL OR NOTHING" REACTION DURING ELECTRICITY NATIONALIZATION DEBATES IN EARLY 1960'S AND PREMIER'S DRAMATIC RESIGNATION FROM THE LIBERAL PARTY WHEN HIS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION PROPOSAL WAS DEFEATED AT PARTY CONFERENCE IN 1967.

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00288 02 OF 02 221554Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1437
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 QUEBEC 0288

4. HIGH RISK INVOLVED IN ALLEGED ULTRA STRATEGY IS EVIDENT. MY SOURCE, NORMALLY THOUGHTFUL BUT LIGHTEARTED, SAID HE IS DEEPLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE. HE CLAIMS RADICAL LEFT IN MONTREAL HAS QUIETLY BEEN GROWING STRONGER DURING RECENT YEARS. HIGHLY EMOTIVE ATMOSPHERE WHICH LIKELY FOLLOW REFERENDUM LOSS COULD ENCOURAGE VIOLENCE-PRONE GROUPS TO RETURN TO THE TERRORIST PRACTICES OF THE 1960'S. THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE MAY BE FURTHER MAGNIFIED IF PEQUIST LEADERS CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE ANGLOPHONE MINORITY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REFERENDUM FAILURE AND CONSEQUENT THWARTING OF THE "WISHES OF THE

MAJORITY."

5. COMMENT: A MASTER KEY TO THE FUTURE IN QUEBEC IS RENE LEVESQUE'S ATTITUDE. IF HE CONTINUES TO FAVOR A MODERATE COURSE OF ACTION, PARTY AND EVEN CABINET UNITY COULD SUFFER, BUT VIOLENCE IS LESS LIKELY. SHOULD HE OPT, AS MY SOURCE SUGGESTS HE WOULD, FOR OPTION FAVORED BY HIS ULTRA COLLEAGUES, THE RISK OF VIOLENCE AND DANGEROUS INTERCOMMUNAL CONFRONTATION WOULD BE GREATLY HEIGHTENED. INDICATIONS OF DIRECTION LEVESQUE LIKELY TO CHOOSE HAVE BEEN MIXED. ON TWO RECENT OCCASIONS HE HAS MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE REFERENDUM COULD BE DEFEATED BY ANGLOPHONE MINORITY (QUEBEC 0247). ON OTHER HAND, EVEN MORE RECENTLY, HE WENT TO REGINA PROVINCIAL PREMIERS
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00288 02 OF 02 221554Z

CONFERENCE WHERE HE PURSUED MODERATE COURSE OBVIOUSLY INTENDED TO DEMONSTRATE ABILITY TO GET ALONG WITH ANGLOPHONE PROVINCES (QUEBEC 0275). AS A RESULT, FEARS WITHIN CERTAIN SECTORS OF PARTY AND CABINET HAVE GROWN THAT HE AND CLAUDE MORIN MAY BE PREPARING A SELLOUT BY COMPROMISING ON CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS SHORT OF POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY. ONE HOPES THAT LEVESQUE'S WILL AND ABILITY TO RESIST PRESSURES TO HARDEN TACTICS WILL REMAIN FIRM. IF NOT, SCENARIO OUTLINED ABOVE IS PLAUSIBLE.
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